

ON COURSE

Vol 4

POEMS FROM THE PK SUMMER SCHOOL POETS 2025



Edited by Jim Bennett

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SARAH BECKETT



Sarah Beckett lives in the West Indies. Her poetry has been published in anthologies in the USA, the UK, Australia and Trinidad, and recently her poem 'Stardust' won second prize in the Poetry Kit International Poetry Competition 2025. She has two books published; 'IERE Living in the Land of the Humming Bird' and 'I wrote my heart across an unknown sky Homage to Camus.'

Poems

Drinking with Akhmatova

Dry your Tears

Dad's Piano Seasons

Drinking with Akhmatova

With you I drink to our undoing,
to the monsters of deceit,
to all those who trample
truth beneath their feet,

toast treason and corruption
say farewell to justice,
ethics now a foreign language
tyranny revived.

I raise my glass to you my dear,
our loneliness together,
our ruined life
the dead's blank eyes, the fact
God has not saved us.

Published Rough Diamond: 100 Poems for the 21st Century Anthology 2025

Dry Your Tears

Yes, I know
the news is bad - but ;look
there is beauty in this world,
where the clouds lark about in fields of blue
chasing each other across the sky;
and a man and a woman entwine their arms,
walk along the water's edge
burnished black-gold in the morning sun.

Dry your tears,
there is beauty here
in the language of the unsaid,
where the flame-trees flower
and pelicans still cross the bay at twilight,
unafraid of the approaching night
host to a thousand astonished stars,
and the sea, rocked in the moon's forgiving light.

Published The Stafford Challenge Anthology 2025

Dad's Piano Seasons

In Spring when bluebells bloomed
 blue as the floor of heaven,
 you played Chopin's Etudes

and music unfurled
 like a string of pearls
 through an open window.

I reeled through summer
 to the strains of jazz,
 and rollicking Beiderbeck Rags,

poppies rocked on their stalks in the breeze
 while I lay in the long grass
 dizzy with sunlight and music.

Autumn swept in with red sunsets,
 trees turned bronze,
 you swigged your whisky in a golden room,

sang *Autumn Leaves* and *Cry me River*
 while I sat in front of the fire
 dreaming and roasting marshmallows.

On winter evenings I'd sit on the piano-stool
 with you and watch the snow fall down
 while we sang Little Town of Bethlehem .

ION CORCOS



Ion Corcos was born in Sydney, Australia in 1969. He has been published in *Best of Australian Poems*, *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Westerly*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Southword*, and other journals. Ion is the author of *Spring Days* (Yavanika Press, 2025) & *A Spoon of Honey* (Flutter Press, 2018).

Poems

In my Practice of Acceptance
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A Gusty Pier on a Winter's Day

In my Practice of Acceptance

On the train, late out of the station,
I take a seat, this time alone, until a man asks
if he can sit on the seat beside me.
Outside, fields, mountains, low mist.
Yesterday, as I sat on a park bench,
I heard a thump: a dead bird fallen
from a tree; a magpie appeared,
picked at its feathers, tossed them away,
dragged the body towards another tree.
As the train moves on, I gradually
get used to the man sitting beside me.
I imagined this day months ago,
but I didn't include the rain that fell this morning,
my aloneness, that I would practice
acceptance. I did not know this, but the test
began yesterday, as I waited for you.

First published in *Australian Poetry Journal*

An Unspoken Covenant

A jackdaw lands on the edge of a roof,
wipes snow from a walnut it has taken,
taps the shell until it cracks apart.
It glances at another bird passing above,

the sudden shift of snow on an awning.
Steely beak picks at the nut, knocks *caw*
into the air, leaving its meagre feast split,
as it disappears over a karstic lake.

On the water, coots have less room to hide
now that more reeds have been cut,
and snow has pushed the rusted clumps over,
unmelted ice keeping them down.
In a room, a painting of Poseidon on a rock:
outside the frame; illumination, a wall.

First published in *The Bombay Literary Magazine*

A Gusty Pier on a Winter's Day

A flock of gulls rises from a choppy sea,
hangs aloft in abeyance – a distraction,
the outpouring of a cut, winter's anguish;
in the confusion, disarrangement.

What is always present, just further –
the background, the canvas – disappears,
as if it never was. When it is overlooked,
or overlayed, by gulls, for example,

the seen is always via a detour:
it has already been; no more smooth stones,
drifts of kelp on the shore;
and so life becomes a flock of gulls.

Even when you shut your eyes, dream: gulls,
gulls, gulls. As if there is nothing more to see,
as if the journey has finished;
yet it persists, always unfolding.

An opening, a way out: to see the flock depart,
and at the same time, the unending sea.

First published in *Clerestory*

KATHRYN DE LEON



Kathryn de Leon is from Los Angeles, California but has been living in England for fifteen years. She is a teacher and lived in Japan for six years teaching English to Japanese university students. Her poems have appeared in several magazines in the US including *Calliope*, *Aaduna*, and *Black Fox*, in Mexico *The Ofi Press*, and in the UK, *London Grip*, *Amethyst Review*, *New Critique*, and *The High Window* where she was the Featured American Poet.

Poems

God Was on Trial in 1971

My Father's Bass

Prediction 21 June 2020

God Was on Trial in 1971

I cut school to visit the Manson girls
on a Los Angeles sidewalk outside the court
where their god was on trial.

Squeaky Fromme shouted "You can do it!"
as I trudged up the steep street towards the girls.
I joined them on the ground, sat seiza,
hands palm up in my lap for hours,
high on the stark beauty of their shaved heads
grouped like pale planets in orbit
around the wide eyes of an awestruck
fifteen-year-old girl.

They had X-ed themselves out of society,
carved the proof between their eyes.
I wanted to carve my forehead.
I wore my bloody X on the inside.

I kept a matchstick one of the girls
dropped in the street.

Published in *Triggerfish Critical Review*, Issue 33

My Father's Bass

It was always in the corner of the family room,
a tall, voluptuous figure of shiny brown
topped with the curled tail of a seahorse,
leaning lazily against the wall,
cocky and familiar as a family member,
patiently waiting for my father's hands
to pull it into his arms.

The two of them stood side by side like brothers,
twins joined together
for jazz and big band music practice.

Sometimes my father coaxed me
small and timid into the living room
as smoky and bright as a spotlighted stage,
guitars and lap steel guitar joining the bass,
his musician friends seated, smiling at me.

A quiet man, my father let the bass's deep voice
speak for him, the notes thumping
like an adrenaline-fuelled heartbeat,
his brown fingers thick and full of jazz
as they moved agilely along the strings
like a sculptor's hands working in clay,
creating invisible masterpieces that hung on the air
of those safe childhood evenings.

I hear my father when I hear jazz.
I listen for the bass and he's there.
It's as if his heart is still beating somewhere,
telling me he's still with me
if I will only just listen.

Published in *Two Hawks Quarterly*, Spring 2022 issue

The world was supposed to end last Sunday
but I completely forgot.
I had planned to check if the sky looked strange
or if the sun dimmed at midday
as it sometimes does
in my dreams.

My mother remembered many such predictions
in her lifetime.
I myself have lost count of those in my life.

Some of us try to push and bend the world
to fit neatly into these prophecies.
Or we push and bend the prophecies
to fit the world.
Especially those of Nostradamus.

Nostradamus.

His huge name thuds
like a black door slamming shut.
How can we not believe?

I hold a bit of my breath
with each prediction
wondering if this could be a correct one.
In 1969 California was to sink into the sea,
so I should know better.

But none of this matters
since we will all have our own unique,
personal end of the world.
We are each a sealed envelope
with an indelibly written date,
a life-sized secret, somewhere within us:

the anniversary of our death
that we pass every year without knowing.

On that day, we wake, we eat, we live.
The sky watches us,
patient and filled with God.
Waiting.

(Cont)

(Cont)

Then the day is finished,
forgotten like a turned page.
It rides the earth's sad blue away from us
but returns again and again
never giving up.

Until finally it stands before us,
its God-sized hands raised
blocking our way
and the world ends
without a prediction.

Published in *London Grip*, July 2020

DIANA HILLS



Diana is a walker, grandmother, volunteer and many other things beside.

Prayer for today

The bot speaks
How can I help you?
Prayer for today
though God's not listening
I thirst for a voice
comfort of my fleece
in furious wind,
A voice, clear as a lute,
that can pierce
the muffle in my ear
Bot speaks
still need help?
My stick fingers
plant words on
the dead keyboard,
drops of water
on dry streams
the words evaporate
meaning blank
Bot speaks
Give me information
How, why, what, when
my brain searches
its vast store of algorithms
of hidden facts
finds zero
I type
I want my PC to work
Bot responds
Look at the website
it leaves
no goodbye
I might be dying
but Bot won't care.
I hunger for a voice,
full of laughter, hope
to explain, listen, understand
just someone to tell me
I'm still alive.

The model Mona Lisa

I'm starting to get bored,
I've stood in this freezing place for ten days
and he's only painted one eye.
Now he wants me to smile
so to hurry him, I put on a little smirk
which he tells me to repeat again and again.
I begin to see the funny side,
and tease him about my horrid teeth.
Best not to paint them, I murmur,
And he laughs, this strange and hairy man,
who supposed to be some kind of genius.
Keep your mouth still, he demands
and look at me, gaze at me!
I sigh, fold my arms, and think of lovely, rich Francesco.
That's perfect he says,
I reply I need to be excused,
or I shall do something which is rather rude.
He nods slowly, and I peak round at what he's done,
half a mouth, what a waste of time, I think
I'd rather be walking the dogs.

Covid Rainbows

Covid rainbows with many hues, forms, creators,
once loomed in darkened windows, faded doors,
precarious, wobbling lines, shapes askew,
circles of revolving emotions,
plague emblems in technicolour.

Covid red was flamboyant scarlet,
onset of fever, molten flares of pain,
Covid orange, rusted, sticky, sickly,
viscous fluid in a jagged throat,
Covid yellow, stray dandelions,
withered, bone weary, drooping,
then most feared, lurid Covid green.
battles to breathe in thick pollen clouds.

Covid blue, the colour of cornflowers,
breath morphs to gentle, calm at last,
The pink of Covid shells, pale, insipid,
the taste of chocolate sawdust on the tongue,
and the final, Covid purple,
the prize of recovery, loveliest royal gift.

These humble rainbows
are precious, lasting, true,
colours of the plague
but the colours too of gratitude
to the countless brave souls
who helped the world survive.

FRANCESCA HUNT



Francesca is a retired Chemistry teacher living in mid-Wales, 30 miles west of Shrewsbury. She enjoys all forms of writing, but poetry is her *raison d'être*. She has had poems published online, in magazines and in anthologies. She has won competitions, been short-listed for a collection, and has now got her first collection, 'Coloured Truths', published at Lulu.Com, and also on Amazon.

Poems

Maketh the Day, Maketh the Night
Mocking
Silence – the witch of perpetuity

Maketh the Day, Maketh the Night

As sun closes the red curtains of day,
night opens its blackened mystery,
a silence punctuated by sheep-jaw grind.
Owls dive with pin-prick accuracy
as mice scurry under dusk's camouflage.

Listen to the song of night graves,
as voices rise, spirits swirl to wind
as darkness battles moonlight
at St Mair's on Llanfair hill.
Laughter and tears buried six-foot under –

hear gossip echoing off the granite.
Who is with Thomas in Rose Cottage?
What was Maggie Price doing in the vestry?
When will Old Joe be served his papers?
Will he make it up – or maybe a journey below?

Why was poor Johnny, taken too soon...
it was the drink they say,
those days of women and waste,
spirits drunk between bingo with the missus
on a Monday and Chapel on a Sunday.

The vicar says his prayers on arthritic knees,
a slave to the wet cold of the valley,
he climbs between warm sheets
shutting the Lord's day, not knowing
of His night, where life stirs for the other shift.

Mocking

Don't look to me for guiding light,
accept the gifts of each new day
as sun burns hot from cold of night.

Eyes open wide with dawn despite
Eve's mocking laugh of cruel betray.
Don't look to me for guiding light.

She left my bed and stole my fight.
She found another's heart to play
as sun burns hot from cold of night.

Alone with hate, I have no sight
and sink in tunnelling dismay.
Don't, look to me for guiding light

to climb the hills and take delight
as sun burns hot from cold of night.

I wake alone from sleep's respite,
and yearn to catch a summer ray –
don't look to me for guiding light.

See silent blood from sorrow's plight:
her mocking's stopped. Too late to pray.
Don't look to me, for guiding light
as sun burns cold, from heat of night.

Silence – the witch of perpetuity

John gave me a black walnut box
cousin Ella will tell you more this evening
apparently someone has become aware
I am to be stolen from this island

You must stay and fight
no act of gallantry or heroism
be practical contribute
It will be our happy fate

twenty six letter available
to translate my feelings
a curious stare then saucer-eye panic
my suspicion was met with a smile

LAUREN JARVIS



Lauren grew up in West Lothian with a view of the Five Sisters Bing. She now lives in East Renfrewshire. Her poetry touches on aspects of her early life in a village, teenage years in a new town and growing old in the Glasgow suburbs! For work and education, she lived for spells in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Bristol, Liverpool and Lockhaven Pennsylvania. Her style is a mix of narrative and lyrical, and she enjoys experimenting with a variety of poetic forms.

Poems

Empty Nest Blues

the great global rat crisis of 2025

Hail ate April

EMPTY NEST BLUES

Old dog's dead, our girls all grown and moved on
into new homes for their new selves leaving
us their empty shelves! And the dog's dead! Gone!
Vacant bedrooms! Our hearts sadly grieving.

Clean, empty under bed storage boxes!
The girls-giggles long gone, a memory.
We feed our garden robins and foxes
we praise and cajole them for company.

But hey, camper van's fun to travel in
and we get the house all to ourselves y-e-a-h!
as if we are carefree and young again.
Our shiny new van revs out our driveway

to the Highway – north, south, east, west and on
cruising on-on-into-oblivion.

The Guardian Mon 4 Aug 2025 - The Teeside mega-rat: a 22-inch rodent and the great global rat crisis of 2025 .

little RAT

clearly a young un', carefree, long tailed, you brazenly
scutter along the gutter; sunshine glints your fur,
and beams through the translucent cartilage of your ear
pink as this cherry blossomed boulevard

little RAT

have your folks not taught you yet to stay out our way!
Beware the construction workers digging up the paths
to lay their pipes; in a heartbeat they will spade
you-dead, and that will be the end of you

little RAT

keep your distance, stay away from me! What if
you scurry up my trouser leg! I don't want your
rat fever or bubonic plague from long ago. I must
now take a different path, find a different way to go

little RAT

if we are to share this well-fed sweet suburbia
you must all stay hidden; furry and furtive in your
hiding places; under decking, dens, nests and burrows
we want you out of sight for our peace of mind

little RAT

yes, we know your kind are caged up in
our labs, guinea pigs for our drug trials.
A similar genome makeup, we do share
but people don't care much about your welfare

little RAT

stay safe and stay out my way!

HAIL LATE APRIL

Out of the blue
jewel ice crystals
cascade from a pink sky

and tumble into the trees'
crevices, gnarly boughs
and blossom buds.

Polar jumping beans
turn the green pitch
dove grey.

I pick the pert ice pellets
between daisies, squeeze
a tepid ice shape, the last

of the day's sun warms
my hand, as its shine splinters
through a coral-cloud. Three

crows in a row caw, then go.
Three. Still. Swings.
The playpark desolate.

In the shade and shelter,
of long shadows from
tall trees, I throw

twig sticks for the young dog
bewildered he can't catch
the sticks shadows

SARAH KENT



Sarah Kent is a London-based homeopath, sound healer, folk fiddler, five rhythms dancer and grandmother. She has written poems all through her life in a very stop/start way. PK has helped her keep writing.

Poems

What Three Words at Church of St Andrew, Holborn

Sainsbury's

An Easter Monday Visit

What Three Words at Church of St Andrew, Holborn

Bishop Jonathan flicks the lights out
surprises the choir on the church stage
barefoot in his blue dressing gown
tonight's cope and mitre

//clown.dare.oppose

deathglares the audience
repeatedly wags a
patriarch's index finger of blame

"this is a terrible racket
it's gone past ten
you're in my house
can you leave it now please"

//flat.notes.elder

stunned silence some heckles
as he shambles off stage
aggression in his wake

choir and audience burst into
Dancing Queen acapella
the church rocks

//escape.wink.edit //watch.share.smiles

the Bishop's apology makes Wikipedia
the incident forever on his CV
still Bishop of Fulham for now

//retain.dusty.squad

Sainsbury's

our blue lights flash
reflect in every window
we speed past
like a zipline through
Kusama's Infinity Room
at the Tate

we hurtle head on
heart in my throat
siren like a stun gun
pauses oncoming traffic
a split second before collision

and we're at Sainsbury's
she's on a chair by the door
white tiny bewildered
glad to be found

we take her home
in the police car
lights and siren off
on the couch again
no memories of her great escape
just chocolate chip cookies
her hand in her husband's
his shattered tears of relief

An Easter Monday Visit

Mum is tinier each time I see her
she has lost the word for daughter
I interweave her icy fingers with mine
stroke her claw-like thumbs

she has lost the word for daughter
pansies like purple silk
stroke her claw-like thumbs
wild orchids bloom in the meadow

pansies like purple silk
your hands are so warm
wild orchids bloom in the meadow
thankyou

your hands are so warm
I close her fiddly fleece zip
thankyou
I waited a lifetime for the appreciation

I close her fiddly fleece zip
I interweave her icy fingers with mine
I waited a lifetime for the appreciation
Mum is tinier each time I see her

CORINNE LAWRENCE



Corinne lives in the South Manchester area of the UK. A specialist teacher of Speech and Drama for over thirty years, Corinne started writing seriously in 2010. Her first placing was as a runner-up in a *Writers' Forum* monthly competition and subsequently her work appeared on the *Visual Verse* website. She enjoys poetry writing courses and is currently being mentored by Jim Bennett. She is also a long-term member of a local writing group. Corinne has had poems published by **Impspired**, and **Indigo Dreams Publishing** in *Reach Poetry*, which also published *For The Silent* and *Voices For the Silent* – anthologies published in conjunction with The League Against Cruel Sports. Corinne is also a **Poetry Kit** poet as from 2020.

Several of Corinne's poems have been reviewed in *Writers' Forum* and *Writing Magazine*, and she has won, been placed and short listed in a number of competitions in both of these publications, and several times in *Reach Poetry's* 'Box' for the most popular poem/s of any given month. Corinne enjoys writing both formal and free verse and is especially fond of ekphrastic poetry.

Poems

AI

Sehnsucht

The Feathered Flame

AI

Makes sense of life's pixelled tapestry
in an intricate reasoning dance.

The good: it reads my faulty audiological
map, enables me to hear what you say.

I no longer need to lean forward to lip read,
tilt my head in intense concentration.

The bad: it's a technology that can't,
as yet, treat all users the same,

although it can paint you a picture,
compose music or write you a love poem.

But what are they worth – without
the human touch, even if it's flawed.

The scary: it's unregulated, unfettered,
not in a dystopian future, but the here and now.

Sehnsucht

(After Cape Cod Morning by Edward Hopper: 1950)

Morning light quickens
on the red painted damp course,
and white clapboard. Green blinds
echo the trees, and the curtains
team up with the sun.

Late summer sets fire to the air
in a passion of auburn grasses,
her scarlet shift, her flame red hair.

How long has she been there, motionless,
leaning across the table, gripping
its sides with taut arms and hands,
her face tense, staring, staring,
at odds with the backdrop she inhabits.

Heavy dressed trees sound-break traffic.
Mouth set, resolute, she'll be sensitive
to the first faint purr of car's engine,
her breasts a thrusting challenge
against yet another night's absence.

The Feathered Flame*

Zhivago: from the space between each word
he sliced *to be or not to be* right through –
a million plumes of thought, each a firebird

that yearned for freedom. At his desk he heard
the howling wolves. They ruled the land. They knew
Zhivago. From the space between each word

he siphoned insight, heart and reason. Spurred
by nature's score he wrote – words that flew –
a million plumes of thought – each a firebird

deflecting threats to muzzle him. Absurd
to think the *Butcher Bird*** could not see through
Zhivago. From the space between each word

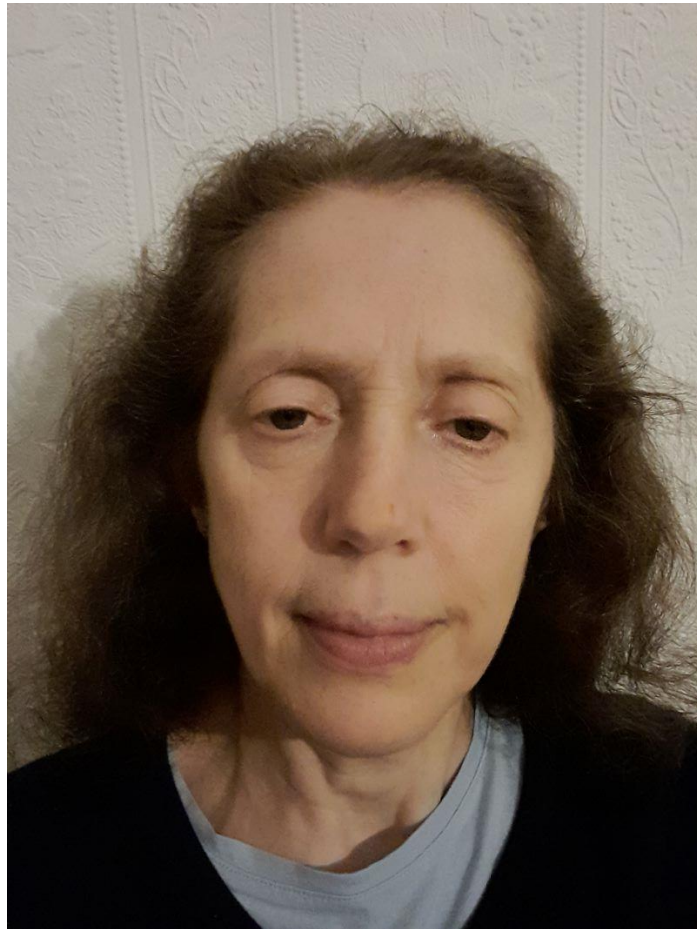
his great voice sang. It soared, undeterred
by Gulag toughs, or agents to subdue
those million plumes of thought, each a firebird –

a covert revolution – people's watchword,
and secret challenge to the despot view.
Zhivago: from the space between each word
spring plumes of thought, each one a poet's firebird.

**First published and reviewed as 'Pasternak and Zhivago' in Writing Magazine in May 2025.*

***Butcher Bird – Stalin. He is said to have crossed Pasternak's name off an execution list in 1937 reportedly declaring, "Do not touch this cloud dweller," or, in another translation, "Leave that holy fool alone!"*

JOY LEBOF



A child of the 60s, Joy was born and bred in London. Married, she has a son and a daughter. and is currently living in West Yorkshire. Her penname is Simcha Lebovitch.

A teaching assistant by training and of long experience, she began to write poetry as a vehicle to help her pupils with their understanding of phonics.

She has had poems published on Poetry Kit, in their publications, Lunch and On Course as well as in Poetry Super Highway's Holocaust editions and at times contributes to poetry threads on X.

She performs some of her poetry on her YouTube channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@simchalebovitch6944>

Poems

To Be a Woman

Where Wolves Run

Mourning (JZ2)

To Be A Woman

So it's official

J K Rowling's been right all along

Biology confirms the definition

defines a person's sex

XX be truly she but is this always so

like those with AIS or Swyer syndrome

or other genetics gone astray

or those who've pulled out all the stops

hormones counselling surgically reassigned

What's to be their status

now gender bending males lack legal claim

for access to female safe spaces

where once frauds hounded real women

with fear provoking rods of perversion

no part of true lass matron lady

though may be present in pantomime dames

and second rate males unable to compete

with alphas at top of their game

wrecked testosterone madness on the fairer sex

Honour's been no impediment to their punch

females battered broken and concussed

death might have followed too

had Justices not stopped this Woke madness

(Highly commended poem in the Poetry Kit Easter competition 2025)

Where Wolves Run

we tread on hallowed ground
untamed by human hand
forest tundra grasslands
desert swamp
wild heights virgin valleys
and anything in between
where wolves rule the land
survivors irrespective of clime
though not of man's depredations
where flocks flee their presence
where ravens polish off their leavings
where Harris's hawks hunt in packs
but where when times are lean
bears and tigers might see
wolves a tough but tasty treat

(First appearing for #promptcombo #Wildlife for #WorldWildlifeDay @PaulDragonwolf1)

Mourning (JZ2)

The sun rose crimson
dripping with the blood of war
of those that died as atom split

as devastation rained
on city dwellers and beyond
huddled at home or out
seeking their daily bread
colour drained by death's dread hand
just monochrome and red
remained reminder
of their was

MARTHA LANDMAN



Martha Landman writes in Adelaide, South Australia, on unceded Kaurna land. Her work appears in anthologies and journals in the UK, US, Australia, and South Africa. Her chapbook, *Between Us*, was published by Ginninderra Press, 2019. Her first single collection, *like scavenger birds*, was published by ICOE press, 2023.

Her poem *Girl From the Underground* was highly commended in the WA Poetry d'Amour contest in August 2024. Her poem *Pedestalled – Sir Samuel James Way* was shortlisted for the Robert Gray Prize in August 2025.

Poems

Some Days I See Bob Dylan in the Mall
Photo Girl
Pedestalled - Sir Samuel James Way

Some Days I See Bob Dylan in the Mall

Today it's Allen Ginsberg.
Bob calls him over, they talk Kerouac.
Around them buskers cover a range
from lonesomeness to love for all
but no one sings Dylan in the Mall.
It's violin, banjo, and guitar,
young ones singing *Hallelujah*.
It's winter and an idiot wind
howls through the alleys
too early for the city lights to come on.

Bob shows Allen some chords,
he plucks to the beat of the street
and Allen makes him cry
for the babies on Jessore Road.
They sit there, tight, talk
of when it was easy
to tell wrong from right.
Has much changed? Allen asks.
I'm another character, says Bob.

They get up and walk, dropping
a coin in a blind man's cup.
Around them buskers cover a range
from lonesomeness to love for all
but no one sings Dylan in the Mall.

(Published in *Friendly Street Poets Anthology*, 2022)

Photo Girl

for eighteen maternal years
mornings were wake-up calls

peanut butter sandwiches
lost-sock hysteria, school runs

her violin out of tune
maths homework undone

moods and music shared
with dogs and cats on her bed

she raised herself
on Bart-Simpson philosophy

'I didn't do it. Nobody saw me do it'
and mining guilt money from her mother

she rode her bike along the river
dark curls rioting underneath her helmet

my 'turn that music down'
echoing through the house

neural pathways laid, her art
graffitied on cellar walls

curiosity queen, she spread her wings
to a new world of university halls

(Published in *Antithesis Journal*, July 2022)

Pedestalled - Sir Samuel James Way

*Here, hold still, let me scrub this mess—
pigeon shit and traffic soot—your soul
I can't cleanse. For that you see a priest.*

The girl cleaning the statue works at his back,
toothbrush and cotton cloth in the folds of his neck.

*Where did you two meet? On the beach? In a pub?
You, polished churchman, chief justice, Freemason.
I'm not talking morals. Grandma does.
Says I've got none. She'd call you a cavalier.*

He, in judicial wig and gown. She in fluorescent workwear,
boots. Petite girl, red dreadlocks, pastiche of tenderness.

*A cruel thing—kept woman in Tassie:
you the Adelaide socialite, she a former chambermaid.
Long-distance love in secrecy for twenty years—
no choice in those judgmental days?*

Up here the air is silent, serene. She's half-aware
of North Terrace's swish-swash like ocean waves.

*You're not bad looking, you know, salt 'n pepper beard.
They call you Sir, but Susannah was the saint. Cold
in Van Diemen's Land waiting for you crossing
Bass Strait each summer. Did she cry herself to sleep?*

Now she's at his front, polishes his pointed finger, his foot
almost steps off the base. Adelaide's epitome of integrity.

*What a mess you were when she died at 40—
she raised your kids, accepted her lot.
Her grief's your grief. Loyalty from you both.
Did you wear a hat from her millinery?*

From his pedestal Sir Samuel watches his properties—
Montefiore, Kadlunga, his beloved Shropshire sheep.

*There, I've cleaned your eyes, the colour I can't see.
Did you marry Katherine for love or for social grace,
Adelaide at your feet? They say you were kind
to the plight of women and children in court.
And here you are, pigeons shitting on your gown.*

(Shortlisted for the Robert Gray Poetry Prize, August 2025)

ANNE McCREA



+*

Anne McCrea lives in North West Ireland. She writes poetry and prose. She has had poems published in The Honest Ulsterman, Channel, North West Words, Tales from the Moonlit Path, and the Seamus Heaney Anthology (Award for new writing 2025)

Poems

Cairo USA

Judith Hearne is Alive and Well

Reunion

Cairo USA

like my home town
at the confluence of rivers
the Ohio and Mississippi
I have a view of the river Foyle
formed by the Mourne and the Finn

once high hopes were held
for Cairo USA racial tensions
got in the way Strabane
was always worth standing up for
the ú Néill and O' Donnell clans
but now in a different peaceful way

in the seventies the young woman who
was addressing a Civil Rights meeting
told me I wouldn't understand The Struggle
because I was too middle class
I was wearing a black beret
and a grey gaberdine coat
with a maroon tartan collar

in Cairo USA Latinos bring
custom to a newly opened
restaurant a renaissance
inclusivity buzzing vibrancy
a beacon of hope
and I'm watching the river flow.

Judith Hearne is Alive and Well

on the corner of Camden street
it was on one of these streets
that my Victorian grandfather
whose most usual saying
was Bounce – and thirteen children
separately or together bounced
to attention – came to die in a nursing home
he could not have known
that years on
his granddaughter would play
super ball in the back yard
and thinking of her grandfather
bounce the ball high as a skylark
while downtown
Bobby Vee sang Rubber Ball

Reunion

the clock has lost a limb
it's broken waiting for the clock maker
a wizardess who carries spares
in her box of tricks

she arrives in an oil stained
boiler suit and carrying a ladder
on her shoulder (this woman works out)
and whistling a tune

at the sound of spanners and wrenches
the big hand is seen to move a millimetre
imperceptibly the cogs ready
themselves for some oil

as the clock begins to strike the hour
the little man and woman
shuffle in their shoes
as they prepare to meet again
after a century apart

DAPHNE MILNE



Daphne Milne's work is published in print and online in magazines and anthologies internationally. She writes poems, short stories, flash fiction and novellas both in conventional and NIF format and has been longlisted for the Bath NIF competition. Daphne lived in Australia for five years where she was involved in the WA Emerging Writers programme and Perth Poetry Festival.

Co Editor Artemis 2024.

Nominated for the Forward Prize 2022.

Katharine Susannah Pritchard fellow 2021.

Poetry Kit Contemporary Poet 2020.

Pamphlets: The Blue Boob Club — Indigo Dreams 2019.

Dancing with Mr. Dapperman — Origami Press 2023

Behind Prim Suburban Walls — Vole Books 2025 — Winner Brian Dempsey Memorial Prize 2025.

Poems

A Long Road

On growing up

Blue — Beyond Dreaming

A long road

The fag end of a tiring day
a long road on a dark night
High wall edging the road
vaguely threatening
as is police car following me
I am sober — driving well
within speed limit
Police car in mirror
night becomes darker
high wall seems closer
street lights far apart
mostly smashed
police car closes in
two shadowy silhouettes
watching from the front seat
At the town limits
as the street lights stop
the police car turns back
towards the town
Later I remember the sign
on the wall — 'HM Prison...'

On growing up

Once he grew up
father never drank
water only gin

straight gin— no ice
no lemon no tonic — gin
clean and clear and still

unlike river water
sometimes clean or clear
but always on the move

like Dad — only at home
in some pub or bar
well away from home

Living with an alcoholic
is like walking on water
precarious as hell

you have to hold
your breath as if practising
for swimming underwater

Blue — beyond dreaming

Sapphire is almost as hard as a diamond and equally expensive. Although she dreams of deep, rich cobalt nights — summer nights as energetic and flexible as any athlete, she will never change.

Sapphire is too languid for flexibility. Her dreams are deep, dark and distant, like a starlit sky. The earth, when seen from space, is blue, whatever the season. Clouds swirl at the sea's ending and the colour of summer is ultramarine. True ultramarine, from crushed lapis lazuli, is the most expensive paint colour of all. Sometimes called Marian blue it is used for this reason. Virtue comes at a price. Only the ancient monks, illuminating their dreaming, dreamy Virgins, could rely on the necessity, the essential 'rightness' of ultramarine, its value. All their dreams were of serving God.

ANNE SHEPPARD



Anne Sheppard, born in Nottinghamshire has lived in Gloucestershire for over 50 years. She has been writing poetry since childhood and has been published in several magazines including Orbis, Sentinel, Reach and Writing Magazine as well as in various anthologies. She belongs to several poetry and writing groups and also writes fiction. Her book *The Purple Hare's Guide to Inspirational Writing* can be purchased in The Henge Shop, Avebury, and at The Hollow Hills Bookshop in Glastonbury as well as directly. Her other interests include her family and grandchildren, spirituality, dowsing, gardening, reading and visiting places of interest.

Poems

We Walked in Golden Conversation
Tomorrow I will Grieve for my Country
The Seagul

We Walked in Golden Conversation

About a mile we walked,
In golden conversation,
Not thinking - stepping out,
Glad to be free at last from
Winter's restraints.
We shivered all the same
As we stopped to look over
The crouched mess of a hedge
At the valley spread out below us -
Where a silver ribbon of river snaked
Its way purposefully towards the estuary
And the seabirds gathered there.
He turned then, but I kept my eyes
On the view before me.
"Will you return?" he asked.
Moisture filled my eyes, the wind
Suddenly sharp. I blinked away
Tears that threatened to betray
The truth, and turned to walk back
The way we had come.
"Not yet," I said.

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Tomorrow I will Grieve for my Country

-
Last month I laid out the suit
That my son would wear for his wedding,
I brushed it and hung it up,
Admiring the quality of the cloth.
He had worked hard and paid
Good money to buy the best.

Last week I folded the suit
Into a leather suitcase, that I hid
Under old rags behind the boiler
In my brother's outhouse.
The Russians had arrived and I
Wanted to keep it safe.

Yesterday I buried the suit
Along with the remains of my son,
Who fought for us all - his family,
His bride to be, his future and ours.
I remembered with tears - his birth, his smile,
His last loving embrace.

Today I grieve for my son,
Tomorrow I will grieve for my country,
I will not be alone.

The Seagull

The seagull cast his prehistoric eye
upon the feast beneath,

Wheeled round and landed squarely
on the bench's back,

His large pink feet with claws protruding,
sharp and hooked,

He cocked his head, his eye dilating
as he summed them up.

The woman flapped her hands,
“go go, shoo shoo!”

The man beside her waved his hat,
the prehistoric eye stared back.

The seagull jumped onto the seat,
and lunged his head towards them,

He opened wide his yellow beak
and uttered forth a warning.

B4dc

Alarmed and worried by his stance
they shuffled back along the bench,

Without a thought she threw a chip,
the seagull seized it roughly.

“He knew you would” the man rebuked her,
So in a fit of pique, she threw another.

The seagull with the prehistoric eye looked up
as others flew in overhead,

The couple screamed and threw the lot,
as the feathered army landed.

WENDY WEBB



Wendy Webb loves nature, wildlife, symmetry and form and the creative spark. Published in Reach, Sarasvati, Quantum Leap, Crystal, Dreich, Seventh Quarry, The Journal, The Frogmore Papers, Acumen, Drawn to the Light; online in Littoral, Lothlorien, Autumn Voices, Wildfire Words, Atlantean, Poetry Kit, Amateur Gardening, Leicester Literary Journal, Drawn to the Light, Poetry Wivenhoe, Seagulls (Canada), forthcoming: Poetry Breakfast; broadcast Poetry Place. Book: Love's Floreloquence; Landscapes (with David Norris-Kay) from Amazon; free downloads of other poetry from Obooko.

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Loves-Floreloquence-Wendy-Ann-Webb/dp/B0C9SFNQMM/ref=sr_1_2?crid=2UMDIM5CGJAIL&keywords=Love%27s+Floreloquence%2CWendy+Ann+Webb&qid=1688758875&s=books&sprefix=love%27s+fl

Poems

ACCENTS ON GARDENING DUTIES

WHITE SILK, RED HOSE, GREY SHADE (1833, Ekphrastic)

GRIMM VAUDEVILLE PLAYS CHICKEN AND LACE

ACCENTS ON GARDENING DUTIES

Gently sip gin miniature from Dunster Beach
minus tonic in a hotel room,
read of a journalist hauled over the coals of bad press:
hope recovered in disastrous lives of the hundred.
Joints ache a garden's unwilding
of giant buddleias, blackberry, briars
and rosebay willow herb.

Brummie accent fluctuates from Lickey Grange,
takes a heaving wheelie bin around
Corrie streets of childhood.
Kid sister spreads broad East Anglian skies
buffed by guttural Northern lace finale, me duck.

Effervescent bar staff greet like distant cousins
fresh from early shift at Tesco's.
Soft-spoken Suffolk lad changes St John's uniform
for family man duties,
children dialect-free by speech therapists.

Gin softens the parts spiced at the Curry House
for dreams of wasps, wild seeds and nettles.
A robin perches on an ancient bird bath.

Refresher caffeine rush
with a morning shower of muscle memory.
Tones of Ilkley Moor or Grace Darling,
bootiful Turkey or Devon cream teas
jostle for stories of bravery or love.

Home for G&T and a rest
as Dad's rumbling combo and broad Enderby
(or Kilby Bridge) roll past to night.

WHITE SILK, RED HOSE, GREY SHADE (1833, Ekphrastic)

[The Execution of Lady Jane Grey by Paul De la Roche]

It is striking, in that corridor between the worlds,
where my brief life is framed to shame the innocent.
What's it worth? 17 short-changed protected years
tripping between home and dying power.
I wept when Catherine died in childbirth,
she deserved better and, almost...

I am condemned.

What to wear? Dark colours, no.
Let them see my flesh pale as silk.
The maid's keening loudly into my handkerchief,
gloves will warm her, later.

My darling Guildford, I saw his neck, so kissable,
at least it was a clean cut, thank God.
I thought we had more time,
Mary seemed to understand. For a while.

They let me tie the cloth myself,
claustrophobic, hard to breathe,
damp faint. Where is...
Will you take it off before I lay down?
My grandmother, Mary, should be proud
as I kneel and bow,
I wash my hands in innocence.

What shall I do? Where is it?
Thank God for Brydges, found it.
Paid that Grim Reaper,
forgave him, of course.
Dispatch me quickly.
Just 9 days, or 13, since poor Edward...
I follow my cousin. And, they...?

This straw is harsh,
ah, that's my doorway to heaven,
they frame me with this block.
I commend my spirit
breathe in....

GRIMM VAUDEVILLE PLAYS CHICKEN AND LACE

This tale is Grimm, set in the historic town of Snotting:
thank Robin for maids and lace! (Origins renamed).
My father, born beside Kilby Bridge on the Grand Union Canal
where he swore he learnt to swim (unsupervised), aged seven.
Moving to settle at Enderby, his lifetime stash of coppers
vanished (small bedroom, behind the pipes, undisturbed).
His mother plucked chickens on Christmas Eve, pulling out
their innards; blind man used to wringing birds' necks.
Aged 14, left school. Worked his father's land, played
Cowboys and Indians on the horse and dray. Sent down
the mines (Bevin Boy) when War broke out. Village lad,
he played truant, signed up in the Army (aged 18).
He learnt to cook for the Officers' Mess, wrote love poems
to his cousin. Home on leave – twice - he married, lived
to regret his father's words: *'Never darken my doors again
if you marry her!'* Unrepentant at leaving home – for lace.
Three children – and two Council homes later – unlucky 13;
divorced and dutiful; the Railway Guard worked shifts,
saved for holidays, praised the Railway Orphanage
for sanctuary – 2 out of 3 children safe – older daughter,
oh yes, 13, settled with his Second Cousin (also,
his Auntie-in-Law). Swingin' Sixties, baby at 16.
Son sent to the Blind School, Birmingham. He settled.
Youngest – by seven years – required speech therapy,
learnt to speak/read/swim and became a poet;
eldest: 3 children (different fathers); grandchildren,
died too soon. Son married, bought own home,
retrained in computers; ukuleles and canal-walks
as retirement hobbies (inherited blindness, no children).
Historically (by Family Tree)? Vaudeville players.